LESSONS

BEGINNER

LEAD GUITAR 101

Flashy Fills From the Five-Note Scale

BY ANDY ELLIS

There are times when nothing sounds better than a hot, flashy lick. It's easy to assume this means playing a lot of different notes at warp speed, but that's not always the case. Experienced guitarists know that instead of swooping across the length of the fretboard, they can generate a rush by simply repeating the *same* notes at a brisk clip. It's the impact—the sense of spewing sound—that matters more than the specific pitches you're picking. Some jazzbos call this trickery, but such sleight of hand has been an essential part of country, blues, and especially rock from day one. The pentatonic scale provides the backbone for many flashy licks, so let's dedicate the next few installments of 101 to exploring this sound.

Ex. 1 shows an *A* minor pentatonic pattern that encompasses just over two octaves. (Five-note major and minor pentatonic scales are measured against the yardstick of a major scale. A minor pentatonic scale contains the 1, lowered 3, 4, 5, and lowered 7 of a major scale starting from the same root. Applying this formula to an *A* major scale—*A*, *B*, *C*♯, *D*, *E*, *F*♯, *G*♯, *A*—gives us an *A* minor pentatonic composed of *A*, *C*, *D*, *E*, and *G*.)

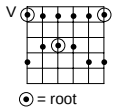
Zipping back and forth through *A* minor pentatonic doesn't sound too spectacular. But, as Ex. 2 illustrates, it doesn't take much to create some excitement. Dividing bar 1's eight eighth-notes into a 3+3+2 grouping creates rhythmic tension that's released in bar 2 with a flourish straight out of Eric Clapton's "Crossroads" solo. Dig into the whole-step bends, keep the sixteenth-note pull-off (bar 2) nice and crisp, and for a bluesy twist, goose *C* with a quarter-bend.

Ex. 3 builds on the concept of repeating elliptical themes within a minor pentatonic pattern. Bar 1 features now-familiar whole-step bends, sixteenth-note pull-offs, and an underlying 3+3+2 pulse. In bar 2, you'll find a classic stadium-rock phrase that—with a little practice—you'll be able to shred at swift tempos. We've stayed within an octave (*G*-*G*), yet managed to knock out 12 sixteenth-notes in a mere three beats using a zigzag melodic scheme that *feels* as slippery as it sounds.

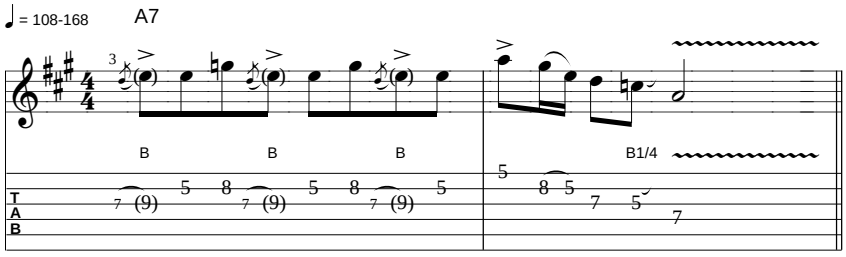
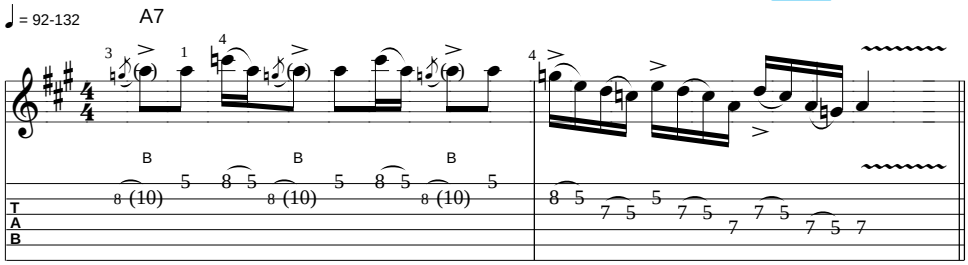
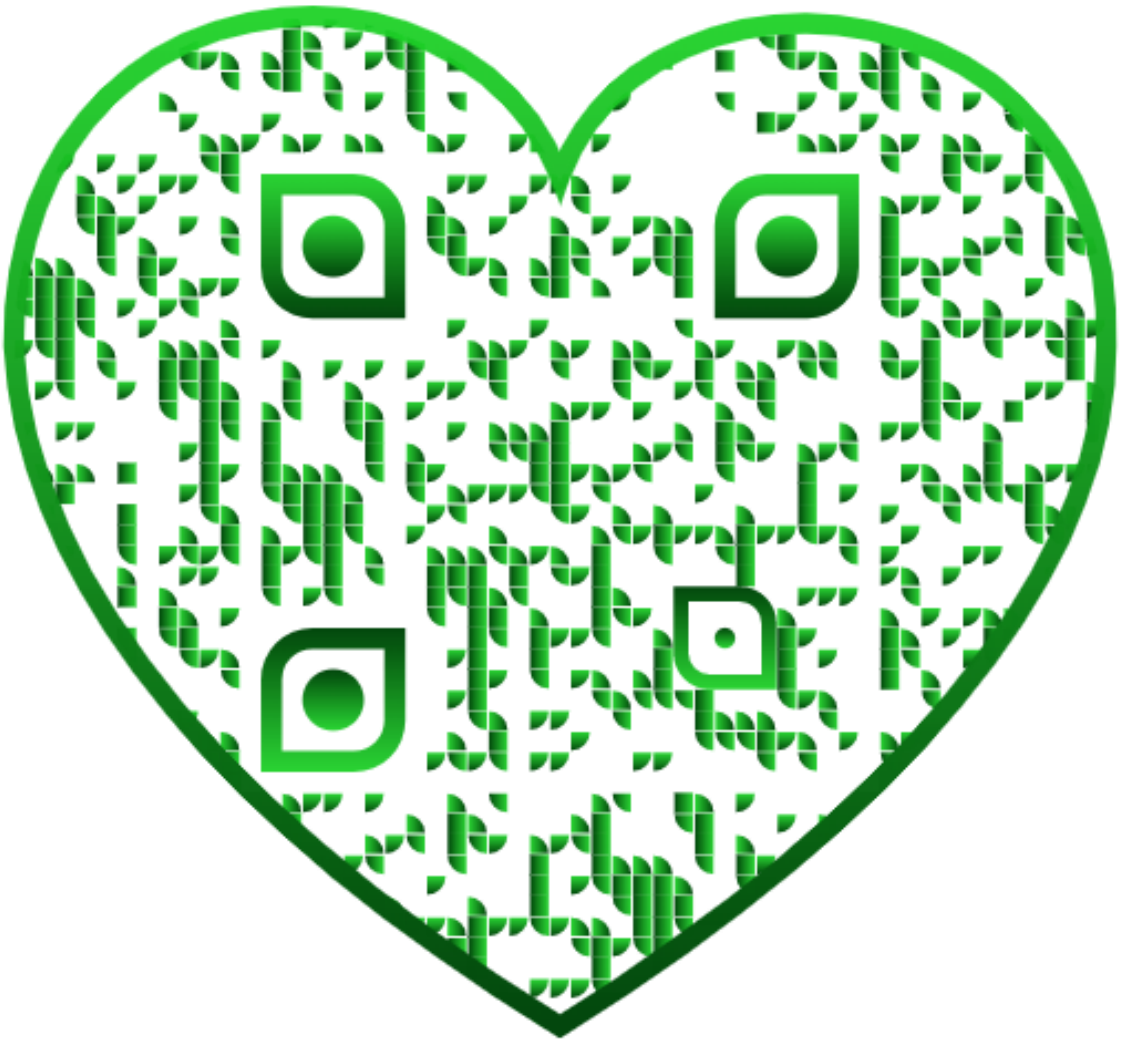
Next time: Hot pentatonic triplets.

EX. 1

A minor pentatonic



EX. 2



EX. 3